



2006

Serving Sophomore Students

Jessica S. Lothman '06

Illinois Wesleyan University

Recommended Citation

Lothman '06, Jessica S., "Serving Sophomore Students" (2006). *Honors Projects*. Paper 4.
http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/socanth_honproj/4

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by The Ames Library, the Andrew W. Mellon Center for Curricular and Faculty Development, the Office of the Provost and the Office of the President. It has been accepted for inclusion in Digital Commons @ IWU by the Faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@iwu.edu.
©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

Running head: Sophomores

Serving Sophomore Students

Jessica S. Lothman

Illinois Wesleyan University

Submitted in fulfillment of Sociology 499 Senior Seminar Honors Project under the supervision
of:

Dr. Georganne Rundblad (advisor),
Dr. Kathy Cavins, VP of Student Affairs
Dr. Venus Evans-Winters, &
Dr. Thomas Gerschick

ABSTRACT

College sophomores have been deemed “invisible students.” This label is the result of a combination of issues students typically face during their sophomore year. Problems include: integration into social networks, declaration of a major, decisions regarding study abroad and/or internships, and disenchantment with the university, among others. A review of survey data reveals that sophomores at Illinois Wesleyan University are no different and face all of these problems. In addition to the above, sophomores at Illinois Wesleyan University have some expectations of the University that are not being met, such as course availability, adequacy of food service, and advising. These combined forces are resulting directly in attrition of some sophomores from the university.

This project aims to justify and design a program that would address both universal and specific issues for sophomores at Illinois Wesleyan University. By studying programs in place at other universities and surveying Illinois Wesleyan University students, I will propose recommendations to Illinois Wesleyan University which may effectively address sophomore-specific concerns.

INTRODUCTION

One benchmark for the quality of an educational institution is its student retention rate. As shown by the tables in Appendix A, both IWU's overall attrition rate and first-year attrition rate decline steadily. This success is limited by the sophomore attrition. Sophomores have been deemed the "invisible students." This title signals a call for attention and change in the ways in which universities go about serving the sophomore population of their student body.

Sophomore needs are primarily academic, as opposed to first-year needs, which are often personal. The transition from living at home to living at college presents a challenge for many first-year students, but most colleges and universities are prepared to address this need. Transitioning into the sophomore year, however, presents a set of needs most colleges are less prepared to meet.

This national phenomenon of limited attention to sophomores is also true at Illinois Wesleyan University, and results in less satisfied and less successful students. The result of colleges and universities not meeting the needs of their sophomore students has led to a decrease in retention rates during the sophomore year. Although there are no explicit attrition numbers for sophomores students at IWU, the Dean of Students noted this as an area of concern for the University.

After reviewing data as a member of the IWU Assessment Task Force, I became interested in the story that lays behind institutional data. An investigatory study was conducted in the spring of 2005 which concluded that sophomore students at Illinois Wesleyan University followed national trends with regard to expectations about, and satisfaction with, their college experience. This study works to answer questions raised by the 2005 study by gathering first-

hand qualitative data from sophomore students through surveys and to make the “invisible” student visible.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A student’s decision to depart from a university depends on several factors. Vincent Tinto (1975) used an interactionalist theory to establish a widely accepted attrition theory, developed after Arthur Chickering (1969) had found that academic and/or social success led to greater college satisfaction and thus greater persistence at the university. Tinto’s theory holds that three individual characteristics (family background, individual attributes (demographic character), and pre-college schooling experiences) differ from student to student and directly affect a student’s commitment to both the university and the goal of graduation. The degree to which students’ commit to this goal then influences their degree of academic and social integration into the university. In addition to social and academic integration, Pritchard and Wilson (2003) found that emotional health played a significant role in student performance and retention. Their study showed that, on average, students who reported higher stress levels had lower grade point averages (GPAs). They also discovered that departing students reported lower self-esteem.

In order to understand how the trends of integration relate to sophomore students, L. Jay Lemons and Douglas Richmond (1987) applied Chickering’s Model (1969) to the development of the “sophomore slump.” Chickering’s model divided aspects of student development into what he called “vectors”. Lemons and Richmond (1987) target four vectors that are especially pertinent to sophomores: (1) achieving competence, (2) developing autonomy, (3) establishing identity, and (4) developing purpose. (1) Intellectual, physical and manual, and social

competencies are all a part of a sophomore's self-concept. Students who do not perceive themselves as, or receive recognition for, being competent feel ineffective and dissatisfied, and are often characterized by low self-esteem. (2) Autonomy can be achieved in three ways: emotionally, instrumentally¹, and interdependently². Sophomores struggle to develop interdependent competency, leaving them vulnerable to individualistic attitudes. This causes feelings of loneliness that then leads them to resist the option of seeking help³. (3) Each person has a unique identity created from all of his or her emotional, cognitive, and physical experiences. College students begin to place this identity within the context of the world, and this helps with students' personal growth during the formative years of college. It is a vital aspect for students to establish and secure their identity because it allows for growth along other vectors, especially a sense of purpose, the fourth vector. (4) Sense of purpose affects all aspects of one's life, from interests to career choice, and is one of the major pressure points for this vector. Moreover, making career decisions are often compounded by outside sources (especially parents who foot the bill).

Effectively dealing with the myriad of stressors in college life is vital for student success and can be addressed in several ways. Nathaniel Bray, John Braxton, and Anna Sullivan (1999) studied how social integration is affected by five different coping strategies: Active Coping, Positive Reinterpretation and Growth, Acceptance, Denial, and Behavioral Disengagement⁴. All methods except Acceptance positively affect social integration and thus

¹ Instrumental autonomy refers to the ability to cope and care for one's self and the ability and willingness to adapt to change.

² Interdependent autonomy refers to one's recognition that individuals, including themselves, cannot act alone in the world and to their willingness to integrate into the world.

³ Financial burden is a major part of this sophomore struggle because of its influence on other vectors as well as students' future progress

⁴ Active Coping - a proactive attempt to reduce or eliminate the source of stress.

Positive Reinterpretation and Growth - attempt to view a stressor in a positive fashion

Acceptance - entails the acknowledgement of the authenticity of the source of stress

commitment to the institution. This finding gives insight into how stress management can facilitate a student's social integration into the university network. For example, if a student is unable to navigate the social scene and make connections with other students, then peers become the source of stress. If, however, that student is using an active coping strategy by seeking advice from student affairs staff or identified peer leaders, then he/she is increasing his/her social network and, therefore, indirectly, his/her institutional commitment to the university as well as academic performance by developing more meaningful relationships with university personnel. Students with broad social networks—whether they have many direct connections or have a core group of friends, each with a broad network—have an increased likelihood of commitment to the university as well as and increased academic performance (Thomas 1998).

Awareness of the importance of social networking and other forms of integration for students' well-being in college have existed for at least 30 years. Meeting the needs of first-year students as a means of reducing problematic rates of first-year attrition has been the focus of many colleges and universities in recent years. Over 70% of colleges and universities have implemented some type of first-year program to address this issue (Barefoot and Fidler 1996). At the first year level it is vital to establish a foundational network that students can expand in the future (Thomas 1998). The dedication of resources and attention to the first transitional year has proven successful for reducing attrition rates in the first year. As sophomore attrition rates increase, it begs the questions: "Has this successful programming merely postponed the inevitable attrition to the sophomore year?" (Pattengale and Schreiner 2000:v).

Currently, many student affairs personnel across the country are working to better understand sophomore students through research and trying to meet their needs through the

Denial - ignoring or denouncing reality

Behavioral Disengagement – entails either the diminishment or abandonment of one's aspirations because of the Stressor. (Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub (1989) in Bray, Braxton, and Sullivan (1999))

development of new programming. These actions will help make the “invisible” sophomore population feel noticed and prevent the loss of some students from the university. As Randi Levitz and Lee Noel state, “although some students leave for reasons beyond the control of the institution, most attrition is preventable” (in Pritchard and Wilson 1989:18).

Sophomore issues have been recognized since 1956 when M.B. Freedman acknowledged that sophomores were the least satisfied of all students (Lemons and Richmond 1987:17). This idea has developed into a phenomenon called the “sophomore slump.” The so-called “sophomore slump” refers to the increased intensity of academics and the recognition of college realities⁵, which often leads to decreased motivation (Pattengale and Schreiner 2000).

Additionally, because so much programming is devoted to the first-year population, when reality strikes, resources are not available to address student needs. This creates a less than ideal situation for sophomores who begin to feel invisible. Some promises made to prospective students are temporarily lost in the excitement and newness of college. Additionally, many programs are devoted to first-year students that pay them necessary attention and address their needs, but, due to the withdrawal of resources and programming in the sophomore year, students begin to realize that some promises were embellished and students begin to feel forgotten. Since students remember these promises as sophomores, specifically-designed programming is needed in order to fulfill the promises made during the recruitment process (Jullierat 2000:27-8).

Furthermore, there are new challenges within the sophomore year; students face declaring a major, taking classes they avoided as first-years, and establishing themselves at the university (Pattengale and Scheriner, 2000).

⁵ As first-year students enter the new college atmosphere, many realities are overlooked due to their excitement. Sophomores, on the other hand, see the realities and routines of college.

All of these events of the sophomore year (intensified academics, increased awareness of college realities, and pressure to develop social networks) have the potential to create stress that can lead to leaving the university. Stephanie Jullierat (2000) notes that dropping out is especially problematic when students express low satisfaction about campus atmosphere and academic experience. As co-author of the Student Satisfaction Inventory, Jullierat found several patterns in dissatisfaction and unmet expectations of sophomores. One trend was the significant amount of value sophomores place on sense of belonging. Alexander Astin (1993:398) claims that peers are “the single most potent source of influence in the lives of college students.”⁶ Likewise Chickering (1969) found that peer culture plays a central role in the assessment of college outcomes. Joyce Wilder (1993) also acknowledges the value of social connections, especially through extra-curricular activities.

Faculty interaction is another element of the social network for sophomore students. Jullierat (2000) observed that both populations of students equally valued quality instruction guided by well-rounded faculty for intellectual growth that is worth their financial investment. One element of this relationship deals with advising and getting into classes. Sophomore students had less satisfaction with regard to the registration process, as well as accessibility of faculty and advisors. Addressing sophomores’ experiences with their advisors and their overall care would alleviate some issues at private institutions where personalized attention is expected to come with the extra tuition. Institutions often display such attention to first-year students, but then back away during the second year, leaving sophomores with an apathetic and empty feeling. This apathy might also be indicative of unfamiliarity with, or a poor tie to, the institution.

⁶ Astin is careful to note that there exists a delicate balance regarding social involvement due to its influence on academic performance.

Another pattern Jullierat (2000:26) observed was the distinction between private and public college sophomores. Private college sophomores were generally more satisfied with their college experiences than public college sophomores. This indicates that the additional financial investment is worth the quality of college experience. Public college sophomores, however, expressed greater satisfaction with the questions that asked about athletics, tuition being worthwhile, variety of classes, and food services. If an individual values one of these dimensions to a great extent, then transferring may be the solution to his or her satisfaction. In order for a student to be successful, the university must fit the student's expectations.

Chickering (1969) identified the necessity of students being committed to college and establishing career goals for retention of students. This objective is not always easily attained by sophomores. Academically, in the second year students are choosing a major. They are staying with their original choice and taking more intense classes that they avoided their first year, choosing a discipline and beginning (and sometimes catching up with) the curriculum, or, after not succeeding in one discipline, they are searching for a new discipline, which will fulfill the dual role of being of interest as well pertaining to a desired career. Such decisions add pressure as students become increasingly aware of the connection between higher education and their future careers (Boivin, Fountain, and Baylis 2000).

The decision to declare and pursue a major takes guidance. Once that major is declared the student is then left to decipher the curriculum. In a liberal arts university, there are two parts of the curriculum: general education and major course work. As Jerry Gaff (2000:48) notes, "the value of the content of most required general education courses is not immediately apparent to students, and typically the purposes, rationale, and utility of the learning are not well explained." First-year and sophomore students are often working to complete general education requirements

because they are not deeply tied to their major course work. This leaves students struggling to make connections to their faculty because they are probably enrolled in large survey classes and have probably not had the opportunity to connect with a professor in a small classroom setting. This experience is likely to come in the junior and senior years. Explaining the value and rationale in general education requirements—the benefits of taking courses across the curriculum, the necessity for large courses, and their eventual effect on research experience—will help students connect with the curriculum.

Effective explanation of, and guidance through, a curriculum relies on good faculty advising. This is another area of transition for sophomores. They are no longer receiving the specialized first-year advising, but rather have a new advisor in their major, if they have chosen one. Students who have not selected a major are likely to be assigned an advisor not based on the academic interest but based on the advisors who have the least advisees. In comparison to first-year students, sophomores are adjusted to life away from home and are ready for a plan that will give them a sense of direction for the future (Anderson and Schreiner 2000). If a student is not motivated for a higher goal, it is less likely that they are looking for a deep connection that might motivate them to stay in school longer (Lamport 1993). Because of the added pressure when selecting a major, the relationship between a faculty member and a student, therefore, is very valuable (Pattengale and Schreiner 2000). In fact, Joyce Wilder (1993) found that students were looking for more than information from advisors; they were seeking friendship as well. The student-faculty relationship encourages and inspires students, aiding in their integration and success in a university (Tinto 1987; Anderson and Schreiner 2000).

The correlation between academic majors and future careers is often one and the same in the minds of sophomores. It is a common perception that a major is indicative of a career path.

Edward Anderson and Laurie Schreiner (2000) state that a good advisor can help sophomores see the value of their education by providing a foundation and framework for a wealth of career opportunities. This outlook may alleviate the various pressures sophomores face from parents, peers, and the institution. Many students feel pressure to select a major during their sophomore year in order to graduate on time (for most students, in four years). With the high price of education, the financial burden adds to this pressure. Philip Gardner (2000) strongly encourages active involvement and referral to career services that can guide a student's academic endeavors based on character assessment, interests, and abilities.

Addressing sophomores' experiences is also vital for student affairs staff. Student affairs personnel strive to balance students' academic life with campus life through residential and social programs and counseling and health services. Additionally, student affairs personnel provide resources to learn about non-academic topics such as career options. Szulecka, Springett, and DePauw (1987) found that non-academic factors may significantly affect college performance and retention. Mary Pritchard and Gregory Wilson (2003:23) stated that "college student personnel professionals need to address specific institutional concerns relating to student success and retention. Intervention strategies need to then be based on such institution-specific variables, and programs should be offered to address these concerns." Mark Lamport (1993) suggests that student affair personnel work with faculty to encourage student-faculty interaction outside the classroom because student-faculty relationships affect so many aspects of the college experience. Although programs need to be created to address specific institutional needs, there are some universal suggestions for improving services for the sophomore year.

One place to begin looking for issues that need to be addressed is the set of promises made during students' recruitment to the university (Jullierat 2000:27). There should be few

illusions about the range of services the campus is able to deliver. By comparing the admissions dialogue with actual experience on campus, if discrepancies exist they can be addressed. Taking this step will enhance student satisfaction and increase student retention.

Once students are at the university, there are steps that student affairs staff can take to assist sophomores: developing special programs for sophomores, developing mentoring relationships, and providing individual counseling to sophomores (Lemons and Richmond 1987). One key dimension of individual counseling is advising, which can be received formally through faculty or informally through peers. Peer counseling can be a powerful tool within a system that ensures well trained peers. Lyle Gohn, James Swart, and Sharon Donnelly (2001:292) recommended several strategies to assisting sophomores: most notably, enhancing advising as well as degree credit check system so sophomores can more easily navigate the university and “see the light at the end of the tunnel.”⁷

Besides these specific suggestions, campus resources can be made more accessible structurally. A case study conducted at Washburn University suggests a unification of services traditionally offered through different departments such as career services, a writing center, tutoring assistants, counseling services, and academic advising (Consolvo 2002). This study showed that student awareness of the range of services was improved and referrals could be made more easily due to unification. Additionally, there were fewer stigmas attached to students seeking a particular form of help because all the services were located under one roof. There were also financial implications for the university as budgets and some personnel were consolidated. Another structural change that has proved successful is creating a council comprised of representatives from student affairs staff, faculty, administration, and students.

⁷ Two other notable suggestions include (1) offering career oriented workshops for both major and career discernment, and (2) courses designed for the sophomore year should incorporate use of resources campus wide, such as the library or group work to encourage expansion of the social network.

This sophomore council concentrates on assessing sophomore development; such is the case at the College of William and Mary (Lemons and Richmond 1987:17).

University personnel across the nation have effectively addressed first-year specific issues by implementing first-year specific programs. This has been a deterrent for first-year attrition leading to increased retention rates. The successfully served first-year populations, a year later, are feeling a void in services offered to them as sophomores. It is time for more colleges and universities, including Illinois Wesleyan University (IWU), to address the needs of sophomores. Retaining students benefits the university both financially and statistically. Moreover, universities can create more pride for the university if *all* students are satisfied. For students, each year's experience builds on the previous year. It is vital that students have a high-quality sophomore year so the latter half of their college career can also be successful.

METHODS

This study took place in the spring of 2006. Data from this study came from three qualitative sources that specifically targeted the sophomore student population⁸. The first source of data elicited information from sophomore students at Illinois Wesleyan University via a survey instrument (see Appendix B). I asked two groups of students to take the survey. Ten of the eighteen students that participated were members of a psychology statistics class and were offered two points of extra credit for participating in the study. The professor introduced me, as the researcher. After a brief description of the study aims and an explanation of confidentiality and the consent form, the surveys were distributed and I left the room for fifteen minutes. This allowed those not wanting to participate to leave without pressure. Additionally, it allowed students taking the survey to remain confidential. I attached consent forms to the front of the

⁸ The classification of "sophomore" depended not on number of credits, but on number of semesters completed.

surveys and asked students to detach the consent form and form two separate piles when returning them.

The second population to take the survey was a snowball sample of students. Snowball samples begin with an informant who knows people in the population being targeted. For this study there were two informants, one was a resident hall director and the other was the president of a Greek house. From the two and three names they gave me, respectively, I was able to contact four students via email and meet them to administer the survey. Two of those participants were able to give me two names each which led to my total snowball sample of eight students⁹. The surveys were administered in a similar fashion as with the psychology class sample.

Of the eighteen total respondents (f=12, m=8) half had considered leaving the university or are leaving at the end of the year and the other half had never contemplated leaving. There was a wide range of academic concentrations present in the sample (Psychology (9), Business/Economics (3), History (1), Political Science (1), Mathematics (1), Educational Studies (1), English (1), Biology (1)). Many of these students had minors or second majors or were pre-medicine or physical therapy. All surveys were administered in a one-week time frame.

The remaining data come from exit surveys and comments collected at the 2001 and 2002 sophomore class dinners. Exit interview surveys provided insights about both strengths and shortcomings of the university by asking students to respond to the following prompts: "Best Experience at IWU," "Worst Experience at IWU," "Academic Experience at IWU," "Residential Experience at IWU," "Social Experience at IWU," and "Did IWU Live Up To Its Promises?"

⁹ These eight students also had been identified by student affairs personnel or peers as either struggling with their sophomore year or contemplating transferring schools.

The Dean of Students Office collected these surveys were collected from students requesting permission to leave.

In 2001 and 2002, surveys were distributed during the sophomore class dinners. These surveys were placed in the center of the tables and collected after students had left the dinner. Open-ended prompts regarding university strengths, resources needed, things that need to be changed and other thoughts elicited sophomore students' perspectives. The comments for each prompt were compiled. For this study, Dinner Comments were primarily used as background information to establish the trends and patterns of the perspectives given by sophomore students.

One weakness common to all three data sources is the incomplete demographic knowledge known about the samples. The 2006 survey specific weaknesses deal primarily with the content of the survey. Asking about students' grade point averages (GPA) would have been helpful to observe if a correlation exists among GPA and persistence. Moreover, concepts, such as a "career-oriented retreat," were not well defined on the survey. As a result of students' varying interpretations, responses differed and did not directly relate to the notion of a "career-oriented retreat" that I had in mind. Finally, greater insights regarding social networks and connectedness to the University would have been aided by a question specifically asking about involvement in sports teams or Greek communities, which seem to offer an immediate social network to support students.

Besides general weaknesses with the content of the 2006 survey, an additional weakness specific to the survey was participant availability. Eliciting the names of students struggling or contemplating leaving the university was difficult due to the sensitive nature of the information. The exit interview surveys also fell short of their potential because individual surveys could not be matched with the specific reasons for leaving the University. If it had been possible to

compare an individual's responses with their motivations for leaving IWU, many more insights could have been gained.

Because names were hard to find, the sample size was relatively small (N=18). Having more surveys would be beneficial in two ways. There would be more representation, which would make generalizations in the sample more apparent and strengthen the trends that were established. Since the goal of the study was to make the "invisible" visible, it is important to address as much of the sophomore population as possible. Additionally, having a larger sample would yield data that spoke to both the positive and negative experiences and perceptions of IWU. This would result in knowing what areas to improve and what areas to use as a foundation for building a future program.

It should be noted that discussion about sophomore attrition at IWU is anecdotal. A conversation with the Dean of Students raised awareness of the issue. Prior to 2005 no records of sophomore-specific attrition were kept. Attrition was tracked for first-year students and for upperclassmen. This indicates that sophomore students, namely those leaving the University, were truly "invisible" as their attrition was hidden amongst juniors and seniors. For this study, few numbers could be found to support claims about sophomore attrition. Although the Dean of Students was aware that sophomore students face several issues, the lack of attention paid to this population, even when leaving the University, signifies that more attention to sophomores is warranted. Despite these shortcomings, the data collected offered multiple insights into the sophomore experience at Illinois Wesleyan University.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Qualitative analyses of data gives significant insight on the perspectives of sophomore students, and, more specifically, sophomores leaving the University or contemplating leaving the University. According to the exit interview data, in the 2004-05 school-year, 25 sophomores left the university. Thus far in the 2005-06 school-year, sixteen students have left the University. At this time during the 2004-05 school-year, a similar number of students had left the University, indicating that by the end of the 2005-06 school-year it is probable that, by the end of the year, close to 25 sophomore students will have left the University.

The three sources of information (2006 survey, exit interview surveys, and class dinner comments) cover many areas of the University which gives a holistic view of the sophomore experience. This study focused on data elicited regarding sophomore (1) withdrawal of resources, (2) academics, (3) faculty and advising, and (4) social atmosphere. Moreover, students gave suggestions about how to better serve their population.

1. Withdrawal of Resources

This discussion will begin where an IWU student begins: in the admissions office. Prospective students gain information about the University here and set their expectations based on said information. Coming to IWU includes a financial commitment that exceeds that of most state universities, especially in-state, where a majority of the IWU community comes from. Therefore, it is important that what prospective students expect when they make that commitment matches what they experience as students attending the University. This disconnect between expectations and reality often become noticeable during the sophomore year when less attention is paid to sophomore students and the newness of the university has worn off. On the 2006 surveys, three sophomores eluded to the sophomore year being more routine and less

exciting than their first-year. One sophomore said sophomores “are done with the honeymoon of being at a new college, and yet still have a long way to go, which can be intimidating.”

As sophomores face this reality, there are fewer resources as easily accessible as there were during their first year. One predominant trend that developed in response to the prompt, “Describe your view of transitioning from being a first-year to being a sophomore,” identified the withdrawing of resources as a negative aspect of the transition and adds to the feeling of being invisible on campus. Of the twelve respondents indicating this, half considered transferring as sophomores. This suggests that sophomores, both content and discontent at IWU, recognize that less attention and resources, especially from their residential staffs, increase the stress during the sophomore year. As one sophomore stated, “sophomore year did change a little from the first year. I felt we weren’t ‘taken care of.’ It seemed we were sort of forgotten.”

2. Academics

One of the primary reasons for attending college is an academic program. There are two important aspects of academics often considered by students: if the school offers the students’ desired degree and the quality of the University, often defined by national recognition. Illinois Wesleyan appears to challenge their students at an appropriate and appreciated level. It seems, however, it seems that students, especially those who come into college undecided, tend to leave the University seeking a major or a concentration that Illinois Wesleyan does not offer, or they are seeking a stronger program for their major. Sophomores are exceptionally vulnerable to this factor because at this point in college they are declaring their majors and beginning to set long term goals. The exit interviews from both 2005 and 2006 reveal that 25% of students leaving the university indicated their reason for transferring was the pursuit of a major not offered at IWU (4 of 16 and 6 of 24 students in 2005 and 2006, respectively). One remark from a class dinner

comment gives some insight into this issue: “Bio and business majors have a huge variety of classes to choose from---which is fine, but majors like International Studies, etc. don’t have quite as large a selection of courses. By building up the courses under other majors IWU would strengthen its faculty and provide classes that may attract more students.”

Although small academic departments, such as International Studies, are not able to offer extensive course offerings, such as Biology, students need to understand why this is the case. The curriculum must serve the students currently attending the school and be able to provide the necessary courses to fulfill their requirements—General Education and major alike. If faculty added courses to fulfill more specific concentrations, for example Journalism as opposed to English, they would be denying a large portion of students the liberal arts education that IWU boasts. In order for IWU to expand its curriculum to satisfy more concentrations, there must be student demand for it. The solution might begin with the recruiting process. There is a high demand for Biology seats and Psychology seats due to the reputation of the Pre-Medical Program at IWU. Accepting fewer first-year students with these intentions might create a greater demand for the expansion of other majors, but until then students need to be made aware of the logic behind the current curriculum offered.

Illinois Wesleyan University currently offers the level of academic challenge expected by students. Studies have shown, however, that falling GPAs are a symptom of the “sophomore slump” that can increase a student’s likelihood of leaving the university (Wilder 1993). Therefore, faculty members need to be willing to assist students seeking to rise to the challenge academically. Student comments seem to indicate that this is the case at IWU. Twelve of the eighteen students on the 2006 survey indicated that academics were harder than the previous year, and five students admitted they were harder than expected. One sophomore leaving the

University because IWU's promise of a small tightly-knit community with high academic standards was not "necessarily suited" to her, commented, "I found myself to be extremely challenged while here (and not necessarily in the bad sense, but sometimes it was overwhelming)."

Strong, yet challenging, academics is a trend that was found throughout the data. On an exit interview one student described the academics as "Challenging but fair." Dinner survey comments expressed similar opinions about the academics. One student remarked, "IWU's greatest strength are the academics. The courses are challenging, but not in a negative way that makes me want to drop the course. The professors I have had thus far have me think in ways I have not in the past." This comment not only speaks to the rigor of academics but also professors pushing students to develop critical thinking skills and mastery in an academic discipline.

Another dimension of the IWU curriculum that must not be overlooked is the General Education curriculum. A student who chooses to attend IWU chooses a liberal arts education. This entails additional requirements of credits such as Formal Reasoning, Intellectual Traditions, Analysis of Values, etc., to their course work. It is necessary to make students aware of this before they make their college decision because it impacts their academic college experience profoundly. Seven of the 40 exit interviews revealed some disinterest in the general education program. As one student commented, "the general education requirements are numerous here, and not all are of interest." Also, many IWU students try to either double major or major with two minors, which requires students to carefully map their course work for their tenure at the University. Even with careful planning, sophomore students often find registration to be difficult because they register after juniors and seniors. Sophomore class selection may be limited as a

result. Five students from the 2006 survey shared this sophomore's opinion: "We have a 4-year-plan, but don't get into a lot of our choice classes. Furthermore, IWU has a 4-4-1 schedule, and because overloading can be denied, students are prone to register for General Education classes that are available at given times as opposed to taking a class that was preferred by the student. This course content is likely to be less interesting to the student than the class they had initially selected and could negatively impact his/her performance.

3. Faculty and Advising

An important part of a student's course selection is the result of their consultation with an academic advisor. When surveyed about faculty within their major, students often honed in on advising. In order to register for classes, a student must first obtain a personal identification number (PIN) from their advisor. It is therefore vital that students trust their advisor and have an open dialogue about the academic path on which they are embarking. The role of the advisor is twofold, namely to ensure students select classes that meet requirements keeping them on track to graduate in four years, and to help students set goals for their futures. Furthermore, advisors should act as a designated support system for a student—a person who can give that student specific attention and information if consulted. Advisors serve as a consistent faculty contact for a student and by developing a relationship beyond that of PIN-giver, students would begin to feel less invisible. In fact, the advisor should be a central figure to the faculty dimension of a student's social network. A student on the 2006 survey admitted, "I hate to say we need our hands held through the process but its scary and overwhelming." Student opinions about advising, however, depend on the professor doing the advising. A student leaving the University listed one of her worst experiences to be the interaction with her advisor. She believed there could have been a better system for advising to help students who have trouble with their

assigned advisor. At Illinois Wesleyan University, it is possible to change one's advisor, however, not all students know this or know how to accomplish it.

The wording of these statements does not allow for a distinction between one's first-year advisor and their current advisor. This distinction could potentially affect the comments greatly. Most likely as sophomores students have had two advisors, both for about a year, and comments are unclear about whom they are referring. A student's first-year advisor most likely taught his/her Gateway class. This means that an education or nursing student (both very strict majors with regard to scheduling) could have an advisor from any other discipline. This system creates some tension for students who are uncertain about major requirements as first-year students and then fear they might be behind in their major because of the guidance of their advisor. Although first-year advisors are supposed to be knowledgeable about the entire curriculum, or at least able to access the needed information, it is hard to expect them to know every discipline completely.

After their first year, students are assigned an advisor from their particular field of study. This assignment, however, can also hinder the building of a relationship that could have been established between students and their first-year advisors. This relationship could produce the kind of depth that allows an advisor and student to appropriately discuss career plans and goals and help eliminate a sophomore's feeling of invisibility. Ten students indicated that they did not know their professor before their initial meeting to receive their PIN this year. One respondent admitted, "I don't know my advisor very well and I don't think she is very helpful in helping me get where I want to go. I am more close to professors whose classes I have taken and in whose research I have participated." This indicates that students being more aware of their opportunity to select their advisor could reduce some tension in the advising process.

Often advisees think of their advisor not as someone to talk to about their choices, but rather as PIN distributors. This reduces the possibilities of expanding this part of the student's social network. If students have not had or met the professor to which they are assigned for advising it is unlikely that students will actively seek out the advice of that person. The following comment illustrates this point, "My advisor has no idea who I am: I talk to my profs."

Students seem to highly value close relationships with faculty, however, as sophomores it appears strong faculty-student relationships have yet to develop to the desired extent. Although students indicated having stronger relationship with faculty within their majors as opposed to faculty in other disciplines, students indicated a desire for even stronger relationships with the faculty within their major. Fifteen students on the 2006 survey indicated having an average to good relationships with their professors. It is important to note that nine of those fifteen students elude to a need to know faculty members better. One student stated that despite having a great relationship with her advisor, and learning a lot from her, she still thought that "the faculty could be more involved with students."

Comments from all three data sources revealed many positive comments about faculty in general. One dinner comment stated, "Faculty is amazing; always willing to go the extra mile for students." A comment from an exit interview read, "I thought that most of the professors were very passionate about what they did." With this combination of love for their discipline and care for students, faculty contribute their part to support and maintain the small community feeling that IWU promotes to prospective students. It seems, however, that sophomores are just beginning to develop close ties with professors.

4. Social Atmosphere

The social atmosphere consists of many elements—extra-curricular clubs and

organizations, sports teams, residential living, Greek affiliations, etc. Social networks support students, especially in times of need, and increase students' commitment to the university (Chickering 1969). Student's often enter the sophomore year with the expectation and optimism of meeting more students, but often find the social scene to be less than ideal. The following comment resembles eight others: "it [social environment] was really a lot harder than I expected. I thought it would be more of a continuation of freshman year but it quickly became very stressful." Another student noted that the overall social scene, "moves from being new and exciting to being the same old social scene." This comment may partially explain why many exiting students cited the desire to attend larger institutions. One student leaving the University commented, "The social life here at IWU leaves you with something to wish for. But it is understandable as IWU is a smaller campus."

One vital dimension to the First Year Experience is the residential communities that are established and the social programming that takes place within those communities. For sophomores, establishing similar communities becomes difficult. Since IWU is a residential college, living communities are an important element of the college experience. Sophomores primarily live in Martin Hall and Dodds Hall. Both buildings present hurdles when trying to develop a strong floor or building community. Martin Hall is a traditional residential hall that is located one and a half blocks from the main IWU campus. This minimal physical distance represents isolation for many students who do not choose to live there, but live there because that is their only option. One student simply noted, "social environment was rough being in the farthest dorm." Dodds Hall, on the contrary, offers suite styled living to its residents. This living situation often results in unwanted drama between friends. One description from a Dodd's resident read, "social environment was dramatic this fall."

Beyond the hurdles presented by the physical buildings, students living in residential communities are subject to the Office of Residential Life's (ORL) policies. Students living within the Office of Residential Life jurisdiction, expressed discontent with the office policies. When asked about the possibility of living in sophomore housing a student stated that he would not select this option because he felt "that the residential system is already flawed and adding sophomore living communities would even worsen my view of ORL." Eleven of eighteen students (includes both Greeks and Independents) indicated that they would not be willing to live in sophomore living communities. Five students' justification for not living in such a unit reflected negative perceptions of ORL. Seven students, however, said they would or maybe would live in sophomore communities if they were offered. These students offered comments such as, "I think that would help sophomores greatly as they could relate more to the people around them."

Another living option for sophomore students is within their Greek Houses. The Greek system offers a strong support system for their community. This option, however, is not free from drama. First-year students who pledge to a house participate in all the house events, but are able to maintain peer networks outside their sisters/brothers. This luxury often goes unrecognized by first-year students as they anticipate what the next year will entail. As one student explained, "moving into a Greek house was a huge transition. Some of my expectations about togetherness and sisterhood were reached, others were not as I had expected." Three other respondents had similar experiences. Although this does not offer explicit details about what expectations were not met, it does hint at discrepancies between expectations and satisfaction. Overall, Greek respondents indicated their house to be a major part of their social network and a source of support.

Within both the Office of Residential Life living communities and Greek communities, social programming facilitates community development. For Greek students, social programming during the sophomore year can develop into a stressor. One sorority member said that her house commitments take up “a lot of time because we always have sort of a meeting, required event, or philanthropy.” The adoption of pledge kids and more house responsibilities requires more time and students must learn to balance this schedule with academic commitments as well as social networks outside of their house community. For students living within the residential halls, program opportunities significantly decrease in number. One student remarked, “social support virtually disappeared we were practically coddled as first-years and then nothing as sophomores.” Ten other students refer to the decline in programming during their sophomore year. Receiving less attention from residential staff might be the result of Residential Assistants working with three different cohorts of students and not having a structured set of programs or issues to address.

Sports teams and other extra-curricular clubs and organizations offer many students a social network. Clubs and teams offer an immediate connection based on the interest of that club offering students a place to begin expanding their social network. Five sophomores expressed this desire to get involved more. One commented, “I am in ambassadors club and am trying to get more involved with other clubs.” Sports teams seem to result in a strong social network, but that can become a stressor. The team offers a structured social support system and, because of the amount of time the team spends together working for a common goal, there is a proclivity for the bonds to extend beyond the field or court.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Illinois Wesleyan University sophomore students are not spared the symptoms of the “sophomore slump” or feeling “invisible.” As an institution, IWU must find ways to support this portion of the student body—not only for the good of the individual students, but for the betterment of the University. Pritchard and Wilson (2003) noted the importance of tailoring a program to match a university’s student population. As such developing a program tailored to the inimitable character of IWU sophomores is imperative to improving sophomore retention and performance (Pritchard and Wilson 2003). Any program put in place needs to address several aspects of the lives of sophomores as called for by the IWU Mission Statement. That statement notes, “the University, through its policies, programs, and practices, is committed to a tightly knit, supportive university community, together with a variety of opportunities for close interaction with excellent faculty, both challenges and supports students in their personal and intellectual development.” In order to ensure programs meet desired outcomes, it is better to start with goals and then develop programs. Therefore, what ensues are goals developed based on student responses and program ideas that might help to meet the goals.

Goal: Students will explore their own identities and growth to assist in career and major discernment.

As students look to the future it is important for them to understand who they are and what their interests include. This aids in the discernment process when declaring a major. Case Western Reserve University, a private residential college with a student population of about thirty-five hundred undergraduates, has implemented a program that encourages first-year students to write personal statements prior to room selection. The statements help guide sophomores to make decisions with the intention of working towards concrete goals. When the students formally revisit the statements at the end of their second year, they reflect on the

experiences of the past two years and revise their statement to match their modified goals for the next two years and beyond.

This activity allows for individual reflection on what the student wants to gain from his/her sophomore year experience and requires written, concrete documentation that holds the student accountable for his/her goals. This gives the student ownership of his/her progress. Students can easily be distracted from their big-picture goals, because of their busy daily schedules. Having a personal statement easily accessible will remind them of their long-term goals and decrease the intensity of the day-to-day pressures.

This program could easily be adapted at Illinois Wesleyan University. First-year residents are likely to be willing to take part in such an activity due to the structure already in place for the first-year experience. Using the First Year Residential Advisors (FYRA) to facilitate this activity during an end-of-the-year floor meeting would be ideal. The statements would then be mailed to students when they returned for their sophomore year and statements could be revised.

One limitation that exists is the lack of structure to re-evaluate them at the end of the sophomore year. There are many residential options for sophomore which means implementing sophomore specific programs becomes an issue of who will facilitate it to the students. There is not a structure in place to facilitate this type re-evaluation to all the sophomores due to their dispersion across the campus.

An additional resource that might be an alternative to FYRA facilitated statements is the use of a Diagnostic Digital Portfolio. Digital portfolios present students with a reliable storage space for graded and non-graded academic work. Alverno College in Milwaukee, Wisconsin (Catholic with an all female student population around 2000) utilizes such a resource for multiple

purposes. First and foremost it is an assessment tool that is always accessible to students from any computer. This allows students to detect patterns in their academic work so they can take control of their own development and become more autonomous learners. Additionally, students can create electronic résumés that are easily accessible for visits to the career center or when applying to internships or other opportunities. Alverno College devotes a full time technology staff member to this project in order to keep the digital system up to date and running successfully. The idea of a digital portfolio has recently been discussed at IWU but it has yet to be implemented.

A third means of personal exploration for students deals with career services.

Encouraging sophomores in particular to take already offered personality and interest inventories will facilitate awareness of personal identity, but it will also help familiarize students with the plethora of resources offered by the career center. Following the inventories, students can be asked to meet with a career center staff member to discuss implications of the results. This not only gives them some direction to work towards, but working with the career center staff on a one-to-one basis could also expand each student's social network with university staff.

Goal: Students will expand their social network and develop meaningful relationship with peers.

Another way to view expansion of social networks is uniting people. Illinois Wesleyan University has the privilege of already having a close-knit campus community. This resource needs to be especially utilized for sophomores. One dimension to consider is a residential community. One element of the First Year Experience that has helped to make it so successful is each student's living community. Providing peer support and a sense of belonging helps to transition students struggling through similar challenges. Likewise, sophomore students would

benefit from such communities. Many colleges—Case Western Reserve University, Portland State University, University of Bowling Green, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison—have found sophomore housing to be beneficial, especially suite living.

Out of eighteen student survey responses, seven indicated that they would or possibly would live in a sophomore living community. Many of the students who responded “No” to that survey question indicated that the Office of Residential Life itself was the reason, as opposed to the actual idea of the living community. With improvements in the student perception of the Office of Residential Life, student interest in this opportunity might increase. Dodds Hall traditionally houses a large sophomore population. By designating a particular tower or two towers (due to connecting bathrooms), IWU may be able to pilot a sophomore program with many specific programs to accomplish several goals: specialized programming, assessment of student interest, and assessment of program success at addressing its intended goal. Living among students with similar values and struggles will set an environment where meaningful relationships could be established. Additionally, having an older Residential Assistant (RA) trained specifically to work with sophomores would benefit that student population.

Programming ideas that could take place within a sophomore-only community include pre-designed bulletin boards with information about different majors, opportunities to study abroad, the career center, and counseling services. Social programming that RAs usually carry out could continue to support expansion of peer networks. RAs could also invite staff from the career center, the study abroad office, health services, and counseling services to do programs focused on the issues shown to be specific areas of concern for sophomores such as requirements for studying abroad, internship opportunities, and career discernment. RAs could also focus on

issues that are prevalent in their community and program to address their residents' needs in a timely fashion.

Some bigger colleges have offered housing for upper-class students based on academic pursuit. This opportunity allows for students to work with older peers who have already struggled through some of the hard courses or transitional issues. Informally, older peers become mentors to the younger students and provide an academic support system for students. Linking students with similar academic interests deepens connections between students. This program has proven successful for colleges such as the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Likewise, Stanford University has used peer mentoring to help sophomores out of the "slump." In their FroSoCo (Freshman/Sophomore College) program, sophomore and first-year students live together in a community where the sophomore students easily become mentors to the first-year students who are attempting to acclimate themselves to the university. Leadership roles for sophomores seem to be at a premium on many college campuses. As one IWU student noted, "We are more involved on campus, but don't hold a lot of leadership positions." This program allows for sophomores to be leaders daily boosting their confidence while leading to improved self-esteem.

An additional program that might help facilitate the expansion of student social networks, especially within their major, involves peer advising. The ever-so-popular website, *www.ratemyprofessor.com*, supplies students with superficial knowledge about professors and classes. Disgruntled students often post information out of frustration as opposed to genuine motivations. It is necessary to combat such information. One way to do this would be peer advising. This program would ask older students to provide their insights about curriculum within their given majors. Here students would be more likely to hear truths, such as "Dr. Smith

is demanding, but he is a great teacher and you will learn a lot,” as opposed to, “Dr. Smith does not realize that students have more to do than just read and write for his class.” Beyond information, mentors for harder academic courses are identified naturally through these interactions. Because there is already familiarity between the students from this initial meeting, younger students are more likely to approach their peer advisor for help if academic issues arise¹⁰.

IWU already creates some social opportunities for students that can be utilized by sophomores. The vast number of active student groups and organizations provide students who already know their interests to meet other students with similar dispositions. Additionally, IWU offers many late night events at Hansen Student Center that draw large student crowds. These resources relieve the feeling of loneliness that can be associated with sophomore students for those students who are out-going. Students who are not out-going, however, remain in jeopardy and must be targeted and reached by other means, such as the living communities.

Goal: Students will develop meaningful relationship with faculty, staff and administration.

Student interaction with faculty, staff, and administration continues to be an asset at Illinois Wesleyan University due to our small student-faculty ratio. Students tend to hesitate, however, about interacting with faculty outside of the classroom, especially if it is necessary for the student to initiate the contact. If there was a formally structured yet informal event where sophomore advisors and advisees could meet prior to class selection, then the advisor might get to know the student’s goals, interests, and skills better and could then give advice based on the individual instead of a generalized model. One way to facilitate conversation might be by

¹⁰ One major factor to be aware of is the need to make sure that peer advisors have some kind of training and have proven their dedication to learning as opposed to simply earning a 4.0 GPA.

utilizing, and altering, an event already in place. Class dinners are a tradition at Illinois Wesleyan University that have evolved over time. Whereas they currently take place at the end of the school year, shifting them to the beginning would be advantageous. By gathering the sophomores together at the beginning of the year, sophomores are able to reconnect with peers they have not seen over the summer, which might initiate more interaction during the school year.

Davidson College in North Carolina (student population is approximately seventeen hundred) instituted a program titled Dinner Discussions. Their program focuses on faculty initiating contact with eight to ten students and asking them to dinner at their house or at a local restaurant. IWU could alter the program to fit the pre-existing class dinners. If this became a student-faculty dinner, or even better, a student-advisor dinner, students and faculty would have an informal and safe environment to meet each other. It would provide an opportunity for faculty to share their own interests and research with their students, and students could talk about their own ambitions and interests. This would break the ice and students would be more comfortable utilizing office hours for reasons other than simply obtaining a PIN. Having this take place early in the year will allow the benefits to be in effect throughout the year as opposed to at the end, when there is little time left to establish a connection.

In addition to improving student-faculty relationships, students should build relationships with administration, especially the Dean of Students. The Dean of Students oversees the many areas of student affairs, as well as ensuring that the campus atmosphere fits with the students' expectations. This covers concerns ranging from housing to food services, to the career center, to social events, to health services, and more. Therefore, it is important that students feel comfortable speaking to the Dean of Students. Knowing that the administration cares enough to

hear their concerns, and knowing the desires of the administration to improve students' experience, yields a friendly community atmosphere at all levels of the University. The Dean of Students at Stanford University holds regularly scheduled office hours for students to come in and speak without appointments. Although the Dean of Students' position includes many responsibilities, even setting one hour aside weekly would indicate to students that their opinion is valued by the University.

Another program that facilitates relationships with faculty, staff, and administration are retreats. Retreats have successfully facilitated peer and faculty/staff relationships at Boston College, Fairfield University, and Loyola College in Maryland. Additionally, these programs have given students a break from day-to-day stressors and routines to allow for self-reflection and discernment opportunities. These schools are typically Jesuit institutions where retreats hold great significance for students. The Loyola College retreat was designed from the Boston College model. At both colleges, more retreats have been added annually due to student demand. This program model suggests that a retreat begin on a Friday night and go through a Sunday. Over this time period, approximately eight faculty, staff, or administrators act as the adult leaders and are joined in leading a small group by a student leader that has previously attended the retreat. There is a flexible schedule that includes the student's favorite session - when adult leaders share a 200 word story, letter, or poem, and then the significance it has had for them in their lives. Small group meetings and time for journaling allows for self-reflection—all of this is centered on career discernment.

Although IWU does not have a tradition of retreats in place, careful implementation could make the program successful. Here at IWU, half of the survey respondents stated they would attend a career centered retreat. If IWU were to implement this, shortening the time frame

would be important as well as finding faculty, staff, and administrative to support the event.

Many connections with both peer and adults could result from the discussions over this extended weekend. T-shirts could be given to participants and could become a sign of pride for sophomores and successfully advertising for the retreat.

Goal: Students will become more aware of campus resources including declaration of majors and advisor process.

Disseminating information about the myriad of resources offered at Illinois Wesleyan University may aid students in avoiding issues associated with the “sophomore slump.” A passive method would be bulletin boards on primarily sophomore floors or campus advertisements. One idea would be to continue the “Tinkle Times” bulletins already familiar to students in first-year halls. Again these would be placed in primarily sophomore buildings hung in the bathroom stalls. This would provide some assistance to all sophomores living on-campus.

Although passive programming would disseminate information, an active approach might better reach more at-risk students. Many colleges, including Case Western Reserve University, Stanford University, Emory College, and Michigan State University have implemented sophomore seminars as part of the academic curriculum. Curriculum content varies weekly, but some central ideas that can be discussed are resume building, oral communication tutorials, common text discussion focusing on current events, resources for, and how to plan for, studying abroad, and declaration-of-majors information including necessary credits. Faculty provide information where needed, but students are encouraged to bring up topics and lead discussions. Informing student about their option to pick and/or change their advisors could also to be provided so that students do not feel stuck in a situation that they are not comfortable and as a result become less likely to succeed. This seminar typically earns no academic credit but students

enroll through the same process. Students that student affairs staff identifies as at-risk are especially encouraged to take the course. The incentive to enroll include perks such as higher lottery numbers for housing the following year and special events that are planned for this population throughout the year both on and off campus.

Princeton University's sophomore programming, titled the Sophomore Initiative, is grounded within their traditional academic focus. Their Initiative has in place the following goals: "To improve students' written and oral communication; To sharpen their critical and analytical capacities; To develop their research skills; To engage them in active learning; To give them practice working in teams and in small groups; To connect them more closely to members of the faculty; and To prepare them to make better-considered decisions about, and smoother transitions into, the major." Faculty members receive funds from the Sophomore Initiative to support these dimensions of sophomore growth when they design and propose classes that meet criteria demanded by the goals. Their newest focus has been to expose students to less studied disciplines by advertising new classes that offer creative teaching methods. This program seems to offer great benefits to students who eagerly participate and engage in non-traditional pedagogies. Combining some version of the academic based program with the more popular student affairs based programs appears to offer the most holistic approach to developing a sophomore year program.

Goal: Students will experience leadership roles within the IWU and Bloomington-Normal.

One element of the Illinois Wesleyan University Mission Statement reads, a liberal arts education "affords the greatest possibilities for realizing individual potential while preparing students for democratic citizenship." Applying theoretical material from the classroom to

community experience deepens a student's grasp of knowledge. Explicitly offering sophomores this opportunity would serve as motivation for them to work hard as well as help them through classes that are more academically challenging. Wagoner College in New York City requires all sophomores to take part in a service project with two or three peers which is possible because New York City offers the resources to implement such a program. Although Bloomington-Normal has many agencies that need volunteers and could accommodate many sophomores, the program in place at Georgetown University in Washington D.C. is more practical.

The Sophomore Fellow program in place at Georgetown University is a selective program that students apply to in the spring of the preceding year¹¹. This program attempts to challenge those students interested in learning about leadership through a community project. Sophomore students in the program work with one or two faculty or staff members to design, plan, and implement the program. Their weekly meetings accomplish self-designated tasks to accomplish their goals. Additionally, students are encouraged to discuss issues common to the sophomore year. The faculty and staff value discussion more than lecture and allow students to guide the course and project while providing necessary support and guidance about the project and sophomore issues.

Assessing Programs

Beyond implementing a sophomore plan, assessment of the programs in place should be done continually to make the necessary updates and adjustments to ensure they are meeting the intended goals and current issues. A developing trend deals with surveying students immediately after attending university programs. In order to elicit student opinions after events, surveys need to be short and easily administered. Student Voice® is a company that offers such a service.

¹¹ Some spots remain open for fall applicants but early applications are given priority.

Using palm pilot technology, the company develops an approximately two minute survey based on the criteria given by the institution and then student workers are able to ask students to take the survey as they exit the venue. University staff can upload survey data up to the Student Voice® company website within minutes of the data collection and the company analyses the data for the school and sends them a report within two days. In 2005, the cost for this service was \$17,000 for a one year contract and \$32,000 for a two year contract. This contract includes unlimited number of surveys and/or Web projects, ten palm pilots, full technical support, and training for university personnel. Their partial list of current users included forty-five schools including Duke University, Illinois State University, John Carroll University, Portland State University, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Although these are bigger schools often with larger budgets than available at IWU, the company offers service by the semester for \$9,000 and per event starting at \$1,500.

These programming ideas and assessment tools all serve distinctive purposes. There are resource implications, however, that must be considered if Illinois Wesleyan University chooses to implement some form of a sophomore year experience. The primary consideration is financial resources. Assessment tools can be especially draining. Other schools that have successfully executed sophomore programs have often done so with outside grants. One grant that has been instrumental at both Boston College and Fairfield University is the Lilly Endowment Grant. Other schools have pooled money from several different departments to create a sophomore program fund.

Another resource to consider is personnel. Although IWU has a dedicated student affairs staff, launching an entire new program might put too much stress on the current staff. Therefore,

it is recommended that some smaller programs are put in place first and/or a smaller pilot program be instituted and assessed to measure student receptiveness and participation.

Many methods could be employed to assist students through the “sophomore slump.” Illinois Wesleyan University can build on their strengths such as passionate faculty and a “tightly-knit” community. By using models already in place at other universities and adapting some of our own traditions, IWU could easily implement sophomore-specific programming. The result of such programming would support students’ success during their college tenure and beyond. Additionally, retention rates, a benchmark for the university, would be likely to increase.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Although this study offers some ideas about possible programs and some insight into student perspectives, more research would benefit the University. The surveys administered during this study offer a baseline for student opinions and could aid in developing questions for focus groups. Interviewing both student affairs staff and students in focus groups would allow IWU to gain even more insight into IWU’s specific needs for a sophomore year program. Focus groups would also allow students to make suggestions of their own about specific types of programs they would find helpful. Additionally, these interviews could aid in gauging student interest and possible engagement in a second year program if it were established. Student affairs staff could contribute their own experiences and knowledge about the issues facing sophomores on the IWU campus. Their expertise in the field would provide a great perspective to the development of a sophomore program.

Another direction for future research would be to focus on sub-groups of the sophomore population. This research surveyed a variety of majors. Since academics were found to be a

significant element of the “sophomore slump,” then focusing on correlations between students in specific disciplines would prove to be beneficial. For example, certain majors, like biology, chemistry, and nursing, require students to engage in a specifically set four-year curriculum from the beginning of their studies. Implications of early major declaration and a close-knit cohort of students may differ significantly from the implications of students in more flexible majors, such as sociology, business, and English. It is likely that those who declare earlier suffer less stress deciding career goals and with self-discernment, and more stress from the intensity of the curriculum. Knowing more about the impact of a student’s academic discipline would allow for faculty in the specific departments to tailor their efforts to their specific students.

Demographics, especially racial, are another factor to consider. Racial demographics often correlate with higher attrition rates which suggest the need for continual attention (Blake, Sufley and Cowan 1973). As IWU continues to make diversity a focus on campus, it should not be forgotten for this project.

The next step in making an IWU sophomore program a reality is researching available resources—both human and financial. Before setting up goals and programs, it is necessary to know the available resources. Without this information, planning program ideas is futile. There needs to be a structure in place that ensures the program’s sustainability and success.

This study offers the theoretical support and some student support for the development of a second year program. Before implementing programs, IWU needs further information about its sophomore population and resources in order to make the program effective and efficient. Before implementing any type of program it is necessary to have an in-depth understanding of all the factors that may impact its success.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, Edward and Laurie A. Schreiner. 2000. "Advising for Sophomore Success." Pp.55-68 in *Visible Solutions for Invisible Students: Helping Sophomores Succeed*, edited by Laurie A. Schreiner and Jerry Pattengale. Columbia: University of South Carolina.
- Astin, A.W. 1993. *What Matters in College?* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Barefoot, B.O. and P.P. Fidler 1996. "The 1994 National Survey of Freshmen Seminar Programs: Continuing Innovations in the Collegiate Curriculum." Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for the Freshmen Year Experience & Students in Transition.
- Blake, H.J., Saufley, R.W., and Cowan, K. (1973). "The struggles of Minority Students at Predominately white institutions. In J.F. Noonan, J. Cones, & D. Jahna (Eds.) *Teaching Minority Students*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Boivin, Michael, Gwen A. Fountain, and Bayard Baylis. 2000. "Meeting the Challenges of the Sophomore Year." Pp. 1-18 in *Visible Solutions for Invisible Students: Helping Sophomores Succeed*, edited by Laurie A. Schreiner and Jerry Pattengale. Columbia: University of South Carolina.
- Bray, N.J., J.M. Braxton, and A.S. Sullivan. 1999. "The Influence of Stress Related Coping Strategies on College Student Departure Decisions." *Journal of College Student Development* 40:6:645-57.
- Chickering, Arthur W. 1969. *Education and Identity*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Consolvo, Camille. 2002. "Building Student Success through Enhanced, Coordinated Student Services." *Journal of College Student Development* 43:2:284-87.
- Gaff, Jerry G. 2000. "Curricular Issues for Sophomores." Pp.47-54 in *Visible Solutions for*

Invisible Students: Helping Sophomores Succeed, edited by Laurie A. Schreiner and Jerry Pattengale. Columbia: University of South Carolina.

Gardner, Philip D. 2000. "From Drift to Engagement: Finding Purpose, and Making Career Connections in the Sophomore Year." Pp. 67-78 in *Visible Solutions for*

Invisible Students: Helping Sophomores Succeed, edited by Laurie A. Schreiner and Jerry Pattengale. Columbia: University of South Carolina.

Gohn, Lyle, James Swartz, and Sharon Donnelly. 2001. "A Case Study of Second Year Persistence." *Journal of College Student Retention* 2:4:271-94.

Juillerat, Stephanie. 2000. "Assessing the Expectations and Satisfaction of Sophomores." Pp. 19-30 in *Visible Solutions for Invisible Students: Helping Sophomores Succeed*, edited by Laurie A. Schreiner and Jerry Pattengale. Columbia: University of South Carolina.

Lamport, Mark A. 1993. "Student-Faculty Interaction and the Effect on College Student Outcomes: A Review of Literature." *Adolescence* 28:112:971-90.

Lemons, L.J and D.R. Richmond. 1987. "A Developmental Perspective of Sophomore Slump." *NASPA Journal* 24:3:15-9.

Pattengale, Jerry and Laurie A. Schreiner. 2000. What is the Sophomore Slump and Why Should We Care? Pp. v-viii in *Visible Solutions for Invisible Students: Helping Sophomores Succeed*, edited by Laurie A. Schreiner and Jerry Pattengale. Columbia: University of South Carolina.

Pritchard, M.E. and G.S. Wilson. 2003. "Using Emotional and Social Factors to Predict Student Success." *Journal of College Student Development* 44:1:18-28.

Szulecka, T.K., N.R. Springett, and K.W. de Pauw. 1987. "General Health, Psychiatric Vulnerability and Withdrawal from University in First-Year Undergraduates."

British Journal of Guidance & Counseling Special Issue: Counseling and Health
15:82-91.

Thomas, Scott L. 1998. "Ties That Bind: A Social Network Approach to Understanding Student Integration and Persistence." *ASHE Annual Meeting Paper*.

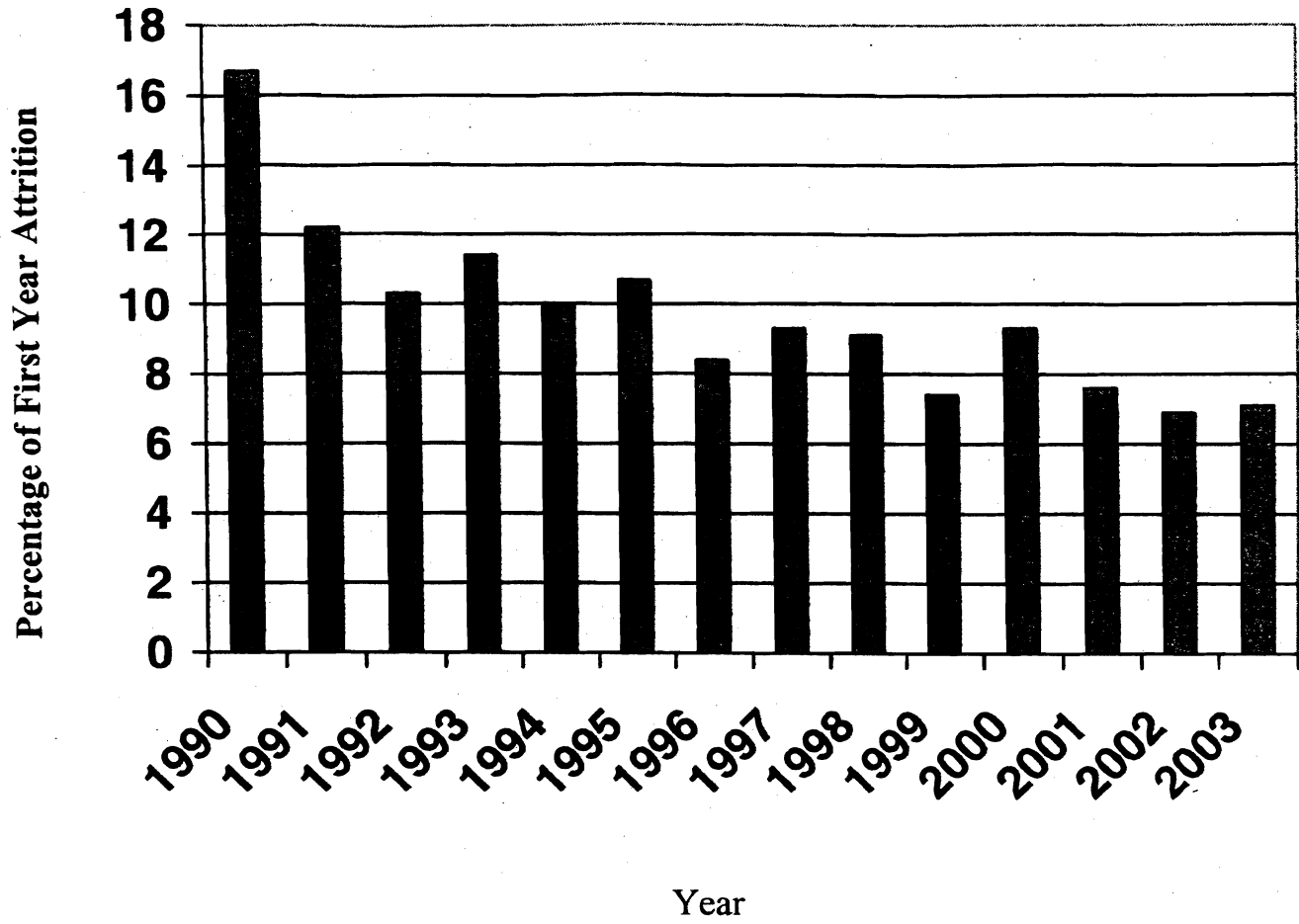
Tinto, Vincent. 1975. "Dropout from Higher Education: A theoretical Synthesis of Recent Research." *Review of Educational Research* 45:89-125.

Tinto, Vincent. 1987. *Leaving College*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wilder, Joyce S. 1993. "The Sophomore Slump: A Complex Developmental Period That Contributes to Attrition." *College Student Affairs Journal* 12:2:18-27.

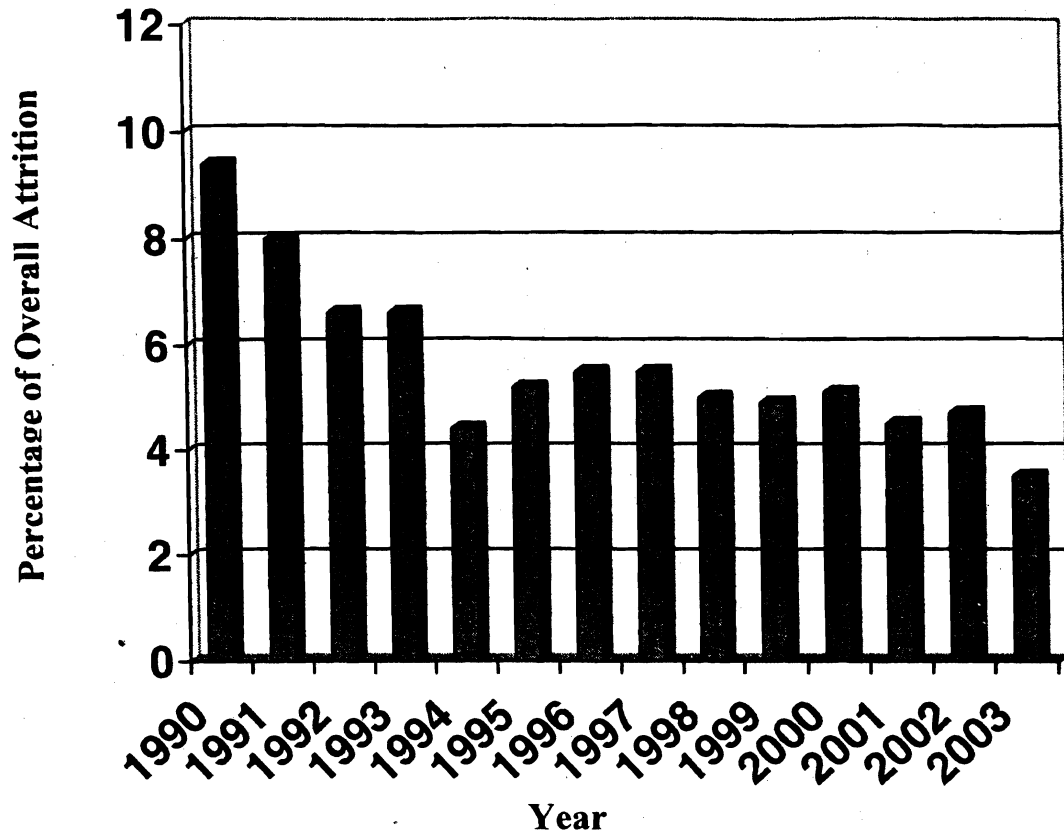
Appendix A

First Year Attrition



Appendix A

Overall Attrition



Appendix B

Name: (OPTIONAL) _____ **Sex:** M F **Year in School:** 1 2 3 4

Greek Affiliation: _____ **Semesters at IWU:** 1 2 3 4

ORL Involvement: _____ **Major(s)/Minor(s):** _____

When did you decide your major?

Why did you choose your major?

What expectations did you have for your sophomore year (Social, academic, financial, curricular, faculty relationships, technology, advising)?

In what ways were these expectations met?

In what ways were these expectations not met?

Do you think sophomores face special issues? If so, what kinds of issues face sophomore students? (Social, academic, financial, curricular, faculty relationships, technology, advising) Please be as specific as possible.

Appendix B

How can IWU better address these needs?

Have you ever considered transferring out of IWU? Y N

If YES, in what year did you consider transferring? What factors influenced this consideration?

What were your reasons for staying at IWU?

Describe your view of transitioning from being a first year to being a sophomore (in regards to academics, social environment, finances, curriculum, faculty relationships, technology, advising)?

Describe your relationship with faculty within your major (including advisor)?

Appendix B

Describe your relationship with faculty outside your major (including your first year advisor)?

What groups are you involved in and to what extent?

A working definition of a social network is all the relationships a student establishes at his or her educational institution. This includes, but is not limited to, faculty, staff, peers, and mentors. How would you describe your social network?

**If IWU offered an academically, career-oriented retreat, would you attend? Y N
Explain why or why not.**

**If IWU offered sophomore living communities would you be willing to live there?
On what conditions?**

What could IWU do to help sophomores?

Appendix C

RoadTrip: May 2005

Participant Schedule

Day One: Sunday, May 15th

10:45 a.m.	Participants meet at Sellinger
11:00 a.m.	Buses Leave
12:30 p.m.	Arrive at Willow Valley Resort: Check-in, pick up folders, lunch at 1:00 p.m. Bring puzzle piece to lunch
1:00 p.m. Restaurant	Lunch with small groups, including COMPASSES and Emcee (and their families)
2:00 p.m. Herr, Harnish, & Mylin (Main Room)	Welcome to RoadTrip! WHAT GIVES YOU JOY? Small Group time Silent time for individual reflection and journaling Small Group time <i>Return to large group</i> BE ATTENTIVE
5:30 p.m.	Free time!!
6:00 p.m. Chapel	Mass
7:00 p.m. Restaurant	Dinner!
8:30 p.m. Main Room	COMPASS Panel: Symbols of Discernment
9:30 p.m.	<i>Break into small groups</i> ATLASES Symbols of Discernment activity "Introduce your Group" activity
10:30 p.m.	<i>Return to large group</i> Introduce your Group activity
11:00 p.m.	Good night!

Appendix C

RoadTrip: May 2005

Participant Schedule

Day Two: Monday, May 16th

9:00 a.m. Restaurant	Breakfast
10:00 a.m. Main Room	Welcome to Day 2! ARE YOU GOOD AT THESE THINGS? Small Group time Silent time for individual reflection and journaling <i>Small Group time</i> <i>Return to large group</i> BE REFLECTIVE
1:30 p.m. Main Room	Lunch with mixed groups
3:00 p.m.	DAILY EXAMEN
3:30 p.m.	Free time
6:00 p.m. Restaurant	Dinner with small groups, including COMPASSES/Emcee *** bring pictures and journals to large group after dinner*** Remember to discuss small group theme songs at dinner
7:30 p.m. Main Room	COMPASS Panel: Two Hundred Words
8:30 p.m.	Group Silence – time to journal, reflect, pray
9:00 p.m.	<i>Return to large group</i> Ten Photos Activity
10:00 p.m.	Good night!

Appendix C

RoadTrip: May 2005

Participant Schedule

Day Three: Tuesday, May 17th

9:00 a.m. Restaurant	Breakfast
10:00 a.m. Main Room	Welcome to Day 3! DOES ANYBODY NEED YOU TO DO THESE THINGS? Small Group time Silent time for individual reflection and journaling Small Group time <i>Return to large group</i> BE LOVING
1:30 p.m. Restaurant	Lunch
2:30 p.m. Main Room	Theme Song Activity Fish Bowl Activity
4:30 p.m.	Final Wrap-Up Be sure to pick up a boxed meal for the bus ride home!
5:00 p.m.	Depart Willow Valley Resort